

Program Notes

Score title: *Lieder und Gesänge für eine Singstimme mit Pianoforte von Johannes Brahms, Opus 63.*

In Opus 63 by Johannes Brahms (1833–1897), three sequentially related different poems written by Klaus Groth (1819–1899) appear under the series title *Heimweh*. The present edition, ***O wüsst' ich doch den Weg zurück***, is the most popular one of nine in this opus, and is usually called *Heimweh II (Homesickness II)*. (*Heimweh* is sometimes translated as *Nostalgia*. This word is of Swiss origin and first appeared in-print in 1878.)

In all of Brahms' solo Lieder, there are four other songs dealing with the concept of nostalgia for childhood. They are *Abenddämmerung* (Op. 49, No. 5), *Regenlied* (Op. 59, No. 3), *Nachklang* (Op. 59, No. 4), and *Mit vierzig Jahren* (Op. 94, No. 1).

Klaus Groth, an educator and poet, was considered to be the first German writer to create a large amount of poetry written in *Plattdeutsch*, or Low German. He is also regarded as the founder of a north German dialect poetry genre called *Mundartdichtung* (dialect poetry).

Brahms found the three *Heimweh* poems in Groth's 1854 collection titled *Hundert Blätter: Paralipomena zum Quickborn (Hundred Leaves: Paralipomena for Quickborn)*. ("Paralipomena" is the Greek name for the biblical book, *Chronicles*; "Quickborn" is a town in the district of Pinneberg, in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany.) With the exception of two vocal duets in Opus 66 and one SATB chorus in Opus 104, Brahms set eleven other texts by Groth to music for solo voice and piano. Both he, Groth, and Groth's wife, Doris, were lifelong friends.

Of the nine songs in Opus 63, the first four have poems written by Gottlob Ferdinand Maximilian von Schenkendorf (1783–1817). Songs five and six have poems created by nineteen-year-old Felix Schumann (1854–1879), son of Robert and Clara Schumann. Felix was named in honor of composer and friend of the family, Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847). At the time this music was composed, Felix Schumann was afflicted with tuberculosis which, sadly, caused his death five years later. The seventh through ninth poems are by Klaus Groth. The complete cycle presents the storyteller (protagonist) as mourning for his childhood, lost youth, and first love.

Composed and published in 1874 by C. F. Peters (Leipzig) when Brahms was forty-one years of age, *Nostalgia I* tells of the storyteller's birthplace and of the magic found in nature.

In *Nostalgia II*, along a lonely ocean shore, the storyteller pleads for the end of anxiety, of struggle, and for ending the quick passage of time. A return to maternal love and childhood are the storyteller's futile quest. It is like illusive happiness dashed upon an empty shore. There are also four expressive "O" exclamations used in the poem's declamation.

Nostalgia III concludes the cycle with the sobering realization that a second childhood is impossible to find.

All three poems differ, however, in the tone, structure, diction, and imagery of defining a lost childhood. Nonetheless, these poems portray the late 18th and early 19th century's emergence of an idealized conception of childhood. All three poems portray it as paradise.

Franz Schubert, Fanny Mendelssohn, Carl Loewe, and others, all composed songs titled either *Heimweh* or *Das Heimweh*.

However, in this work Brahms attempts to comfort the listener who is burdened by the anxiety of growing old. Initially, he was not sure whether to unite the *Heimweh* songs under one master title, or to give each poem its own title.

O wüsst' ich doch den Weg zurück was first performed on December 16, 1874 by the Soprano, opera singer, Louise Radecke (1847–?), Sophie Menter (1846–1918), the student of the great Franz Liszt, was her collaborative pianist. Both *Heimweh I* and *Junge Lieder* (numbers five and six of Op. 63) were also performed.

Heimweh II is another one of Brahms's greatest Lieder. The quiet sadness of the opening 6/4 meter of the piano arpeggios (mm. 1–3) paints the ocean waves gently dashing against a shore, under a chaconne-like bass line. A feeling of a lullaby or infant's cradle being rocked is established at the beginning of A1 (m. 1).

The middle section (m. 15) is marked by the use of heightened chromaticism in the piano and voice lines. There is also a striking use of pedal points (common in Brahms' music) stated briefly at the words "(y)et close my tired eyes" (mm. 19–20) and again briefly at "(t)hen turn back time" (mm. 29–30).

The beginning A1 music returns at m. 36 in a feeling of "coming home," comprising A2. However, this time at the words "(i)n vain that joy I could awake" (m. 40), the piano part is now changed to "empty" octaves (*empty* shore), descending in thirds. This figure is usually called Brahms' "death motif."

In the last verse, at the words "(t)hen find an empty shore," the rhythmic texture is greatly reduced to become peppered chords and a stark bass line growing softer. This gesture is followed immediately by a four-measure postlude (mm. 44–48). Brahms tries to comfort us through the use of final arpeggios rising higher on a bed of sharps (or flats), as if moving us up to paradise.

The overall sound structure of *Nostalgia II* is ternary in design. It is charted as A1, B1, B2, and A2. It has a crisscross, “chiasmus” design, or is in an extended, strophic ternary form. The two outer strophes, A1 and A2 at m. 4 and m. 36, are in the tonic key, while the inner strophes, B1 and B2 at m. 15 and m. 25, are in the dominant key.

After hearing the first performance, Dr. Theodor Billroth, a friend and distinguished German surgeon, wrote to Brahms with the following opinion about this work: “The [Groth] poems are magnificent, and you have set them to beautiful music with skill and imagination. [*Heimweh II*] is the best, and I prophesy for it an effect similar to that of *Die Mainacht*... .” That prophecy came true.

Surprisingly, the original manuscript of *Heimweh II* is housed in America. It is in The J. P. Morgan Library and Museum in The Mary Flagler Cary Music Collection (Cary 71), New York City (Provenance: Medium: pen and ink on paper, 25.5x32.5 cm.).

Brahms’ best songs are small, priceless jewels. They are unusual, mysterious, inventive, bass heavy, uncomplicated, melodious, and are glorious creations! All 206 of them are rejuvenating to hear. They are worthy of being performed more often than they are, right along with Schubert, whom Brahms revered.

Hugo (Philipp Jakob) Wolf (composer and music critic at *Wiener Salonblatt* from 1884 to 1887) and his followers—mostly Wagner enthusiasts—loudly criticized the declamation elements of how Brahms set words to music, claiming that his vocal lines sounded more like those written for instruments rather than voices. They defamed the choice of poems that Brahms used, and attacked his supposed heavy and intellectual approach to composing.

However, Gustav Jenner (1865–1920), Brahms’s only formal student, and others, supported Brahms, and always defended him in public forums and in-print. I will certainly not try to reconcile these two opposing/supporting camps except to say that I and a generation of singers (and conductors) fiercely love, support, and sing his songs.

My having edited and arranged this gloriously pensive and nostalgic Brahms song for chorus is an attempt to build more faithful Brahms lovers. *O wüsst’ ich doch den Weg zurück* is a magnificent, miniature masterpiece of nostalgic longing for childhood, relinquishing mature growth, and yearning for an earthly, unattainable paradise.

In conclusion, however, Robert Schumann (1810–1856), the great German composer, mentor, and champion of Brahms’ music, wrote of Brahms’ songs in the publication *Neue Bahnen* [*New Paths*] the following postscript: Brahms composed “Lieder whose poetry can be understood without knowing the words.” Taken in total, Brahms’ shore is not so *empty* at all.

—James McCullough

Selected Sources: Drs. Craig Bell, Leon Botstein, Max Harrison, Marjorie Hirsch, Margit L. and Donald M. McCorkle, Eric Sams, Lucien Stark, and others.

Text

O wüsst’ ich doch den Weg zurück,
den lieben Weg zum Kinderland!
O warum sucht’ ich nach dem Glück
und liess der Mutter Hand?

O wie mich sehnet auszuruhen,
von keinem Streben aufgeweckt,
die müden Augen zuzutun,
von Liebe sanft bedeckt!

Und nichts zu forschen, nichts zu spähen,
und nur zu träumen leicht und lind;
der Zeiten Wandel nicht zu seh’n,
zum zweiten Mal ein Kind!

O zeigt mir doch den Weg zurück,
den lieben Weg zum Kinderland!
Vergebens such’ ich nach dem Glück,
ringsum ist öder Strand!

*O that I knew the way back home,
To joyful days in Childhood-land!
O tell me why I had to roam,
And leave my Mother’s hand?*

*O how I long to be at rest,
Yet strive for nothing to annoy;
Then close my tired eyes, and be blessed
With love and dreams of joy!*

*And to leave riches far behind,
And dream, instead, how to be free:
Then turn back time, and try to find
The child I lost in me!*

*O show me, now, the road to take,
That brings me back to Childhood’s door!
In vain that joy I could awake,
Then find an empty shore!*

*Edited for Dr. Jamie C. Bartlett,
Associate Director of Chorus,
and The College of William and Mary Women's Chorus,
Williamsburg, Virginia*

O wüsst' ich doch den Weg zurück

(O That I Knew the Way Back Home)

Arranged for SSA Chorus and Piano

Klaus Groth (1819–1899)
English Verse text by
James McCullough

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)
Op. 63, No. 8 (1874)
Choral Version edited and arranged by
James McCullough

Etwas langsam (Somewhat slowly)
(♩ = 76)

Soprano 1

Soprano 2

Alto

Etwas langsam (Somewhat slowly)
(♩ = 76)

Piano

The original key is E major.

4

*always flowing,
with nostalgia
and thoughtful remorse* **p**

*always flowing,
with nostalgia
and thoughtful remorse* **p**

*always flowing,
with nostalgia
and thoughtful remorse* **p**

mp

O wüsst' ich doch den Weg zu - rück, - den
O that I knew the way back home, - To

mp

O wüsst' ich doch den Weg zu - rück, - den
O that I knew the way back home, - To

mp

O wüsst' ich doch den Weg zu - rück, - den
O that I knew the way back home, - To

7

mp dolente

lie - ben Weg zum Kin - der - land! - O wa - rum sucht' ich
joy - ful days in Child - hood - land! - O tell me why I

mp dolente

lie - ben Weg zum Kin - der - land! - O wa - rum sucht' ich
joy - ful days in Child - hood - land! - O tell me why I

mp dolente

lie - ben Weg zum Kin - der - land! - O wa - rum sucht' ich
joy - ful days in Child - hood - land! - O tell me why I

mp

mp

10

mp *poco*

nach dem Glück und liess der Mut - ter
 had to roam, And leave my Moth - er's

mp *poco*

nach dem Glück und liess der Mut - ter
 had to roam, And leave my Moth - er's

mp *poco*

nach dem Glück und liess der Mut - ter
 had to roam, And leave my Moth - er's

12

p poco

Hand, der Mut - ter Hand?
 hand, my Moth - er's hand?

p poco

Hand, der Mut - ter Hand?
 hand, my Moth - er's hand?

p poco

Hand, der Mut - ter Hand?
 hand, my Moth - er's hand?

Lebhafter werdend (*Più animato*)

14

mp *mf*

O wie mich seh - net aus - zu - ruh'n, - von
 O how I long to be at rest, - Yet

mp *mf*

O wie mich seh - net aus - zu - ruh'n, - von
 O how I long to be at rest, - Yet

mp *mf*

O wie mich seh - net aus zu - ruh'n, - von
 O how I long to be at rest, - Yet

Lebhafter werdend (*Più animato*)

pp *crescendo* *più* *mf* *mf*

17

mf

kei - nem Stre - ben auf - ge - weckt, die mü - den Au - gen
 strive for noth - ing to an - noy; - Then close my tired eyes,

mf

kei - nem stre - ben auf - ge - weckt, die mü - den Au - gen
 strive for noth - ing to an - noy; - Then close my tired eyes,

mf

kei - nem Stre - ben auf - ge - weckt, die mü - den Au - gen
 strive for noth - ing to an - noy; - Then close my tired eyes,

mf

20

mf *f*

zu - zu - tun, von Lie - be sanft be - deckt, von
and be blessed With love and dreams of joy, with

mf *f*

zu - zu - tun, von Lie - be sanft be - deckt, von
and be blessed With love and dreams of joy, with

mf *f*

zu - zu - tun, von Lie - be sanft be - deckt, von
and be blessed With love and dreams of joy, with

mf *f*

23

p

Lie - be sanft be - deckt! Und nichts zu for - schen,
love and dreams of joy! And to leave rich - es

p

Lie - be sanft be - deckt! Und nichts zu for - schen,
love and dreams of joy! And to leave rich - es

p

Lie - be sanft be - deckt! Und nichts zu for - schen,
love and dreams of joy! And to leave rich - es

p

26

mp *f*

nichts zu spä'h'n, und nur zu träu - men leicht und lind, der
 far be - hind, And dream, in - stead, how to be free: Then

mp *f*

nichts zu spä'h'n, und nur zu träu - men leicht und lind, der
 far be - hind, And dream, in - stead, how to be free: Then

mp *f*

nichts zu spä'h'n, und nur zu träu - men leicht und lind, der
 far be - hind, And dream, in - stead, how to be free: Then

mp *f*

29 **Risoluto** *mf*

Zeiten Wandel nicht zu seh'n, zum zwei - ten Mal ein
 turn back time, and try to find The child I lost in

mf

Zeiten Wandel nicht zu seh'n, zum zwei - ten Mal ein
 turn back time, and try to find The child I lost in

mf

Zeiten Wandel nicht zu seh'n, zum zwei - ten Mal ein
 turn back time, and try to find The child I lost in

Risoluto *mf*

32

f

Kind, zum zwei - ten Mal ein Kind!
me, the child - I lost in me!

f

Kind, zum zwei - ten Mal ein Kind!
me, the child - I lost in me!

f

Kind, zum zwei - ten Mal ein Kind!
me, the child - I lost in me!

35 *poco rit. ----* **Doloroso cantabile**
p a tempo *mp*

O zeigt mir doch den Weg zu - rück, - den
O show me, now, the road to take, - That

p a tempo *mp*

O zeigt mir doch den Weg zu - rück, - den
O show me, now, the road to take, - That

p a tempo *mp*

O zeigt mir doch den Weg zu - rück, - den
O show me, now, the road to take, - That

poco rit. ---- **Doloroso cantabile**
a tempo

p

38 *f* **Dolente**

lie - ben Weg zum Kin - der - land! Ver - ge - bens such' ich
brings me back to Child - hood's door! In vain that joy I

lie - ben Weg zum Kin - der - land! O wa - rum sucht' ich
brings me back to Child - hood's door! In vain that joy I

lie - ben Weg zum Kin - der - land! Ver - ge - bens such' ich
brings me back to Child - hood's door! In vain that joy I

f **Dolente**

41 **Allargando** *p* *poco*

nach dem Glück rings um ist ö - der
could a wake, Then find an emp - ty

nach dem Glück, rings - um ist ö - der
could a wake, Then find an emp - ty

nach dem Glück, rings - um ist ö - der
could a wake, Then find an emp - ty

Allargando *p*

43

Meno mosso (O meglio: non rit.)
pp

Strand, ö - - - der Strand!
shore, an emp - - - ty shore!

pp

Strand, ö - - - der Stand!
shore, an emp - - - ty shore!

pp

Strand, ö - - - der Stand!
shore, an emp - - - ty shore!

Meno mosso (O meglio: non rit.)
pp

p

45

ritardando al fine
meno p al fine

January 20, 2015
Cambridge, Massachusetts
4'04"

James McCullough (b. 1939)

For biographical information about the arranger, please visit this website.
www.ecspublishing.com/composers/m/mccullough

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